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SUBJECT: BULGARIA: INTENSIFIED COUNTER-WMD COOPERATION

11. (SBU) Summary. Astride traditional smuggling routes linking the Western Balkans, Black Sea, Turkey and Russia, Bulgaria occupies a strategic position on Europe's frontier. The ratification of three major agreements in 2008 (the WMD Agreement, the Second Line of Defense Agreement and the Nuclear Fuel Return Agreement) will result in significant progress in counter-terrorism and counter-proliferation cooperation in 2009. We will coordinate DOE and DOD visits to ensure a smooth rollout and achieve maximum impact. End Summary.

SECOND LINE OF DEFENSE

12. (SBU) With the December 19, 2008 ratification of the Second Line of Defense (SLD) Agreement, the Department of Energy is now free to begin site design, training and construction work at the top priority sites identified during consultations last year, specifically: Burgas port, Kapitan Andreevo, Lesovo, Malko Tarnovo and Svilengrad rail station. Construction work could begin as soon as April, with the goal of having all sites up and running by the fall of 2009. The total value of all work, equipment and training is approximately six million USD for 2009, with the possibility of additional resources for supplemental training and a second round of site visits to next tier entry points.

WMD AGREEMENT

13. (SBU) Through the WMD agreement, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) and the DOD International Counterproliferation Program are authorized to provide training and equipment for law enforcement entities in Bulgaria to enhance customs and border guards, ability to detect, interdict, identify, investigate and respond to the illicit trafficking of weapons of mass destruction and related materials. We understand DTRA plans to conduct three courses in Bulgaria in 2009 at a cost of approximately one million USD: "Responding to WMD Incidents at Borders" in February, "Crime Scene Operations" in June, and "Radiological Detection and Response" in October/November.

RESEARCH REACTOR CONVERSION AND REFURBISHMENT

14. (SBU) In 2008 U.S. and Bulgarian experts removed all spent Highly Enriched Uranium from a training reactor in Sofia and transported it to Russia, its original source. As part of the transfer agreement, the United States agreed to help facilitate the conversion of the research reactor into an advanced Low Enriched Uranium reactor, with training, medical and research applications. Post welcomes the visit of National Nuclear Security Administration, Assistant Deputy Administrator Andrew Bieniawski in January to move this project forward.

15. (SBU) Comment: In addition to the obvious benefits to border security, law enforcement capacity and crisis

response, successful implementation of these agreements may have significant positive political impact as well. Domestically, 2008 was a difficult year for Bulgaria, full of political scandal, censure from the international community over corruption, and the loss of EU funds due to misappropriation. The Ministry of the Interior, particularly, has come under fire for its past performance and is looking for ways to show improvement. Successful cooperation on these projects can boost sagging morale inside the ministry and maintain continuity of engagement between the United States and Bulgaria as the Bulgarian government transitions through an election season this summer. Bulgaria is the EU's southeastern-most border, both a gateway and checkpoint for contraband movements. These agreements and the relationships we build will upgrade Bulgaria's border security, counter-WMD and counter-proliferation capabilities.

McEldowney